

IV. PARK AND RECREATION DEMAND AND TRENDS

ANNUAL VISITATION TRENDS

Raven Rock State Park is an important regional outdoor recreation resource, serving an area of the state that has few such facilities. The park has experienced relatively steady increases in visitation since opening to the public in the early 1970s. Except in 1985 - when visitation dropped significantly to 39,126 - annual visitation generally ranged between 52,000 and 69,000 in the ten years from 1979 to 1989. In the years since 1990, visitation has continued to grow, hitting an all-time high of 121,255 visits-per-year in 2001 (Figure IV-1). This growth has come despite the fact that the park has not had significant new outdoor recreation facilities developed that would attract additional visitors.

The drop in attendance in 1996 was due to Hurricane Fran. Damage caused by the storm resulted in the park being closed for part of that year, and the north side of the park remained closed through half of 1997. Starting in 2002, deployment of military troops from nearby Fort Bragg and Pope Air Force Base have caused a drop in visitation from military personnel and their families, which continues. In June of 2006, the remains of Hurricane Alberto washed out the temporary bridge over Campbell Creek, thus cutting off access to part of the park and resulting in a further drop in visitation. During 2006, trail work on the north side of the river also hampered visitor use.

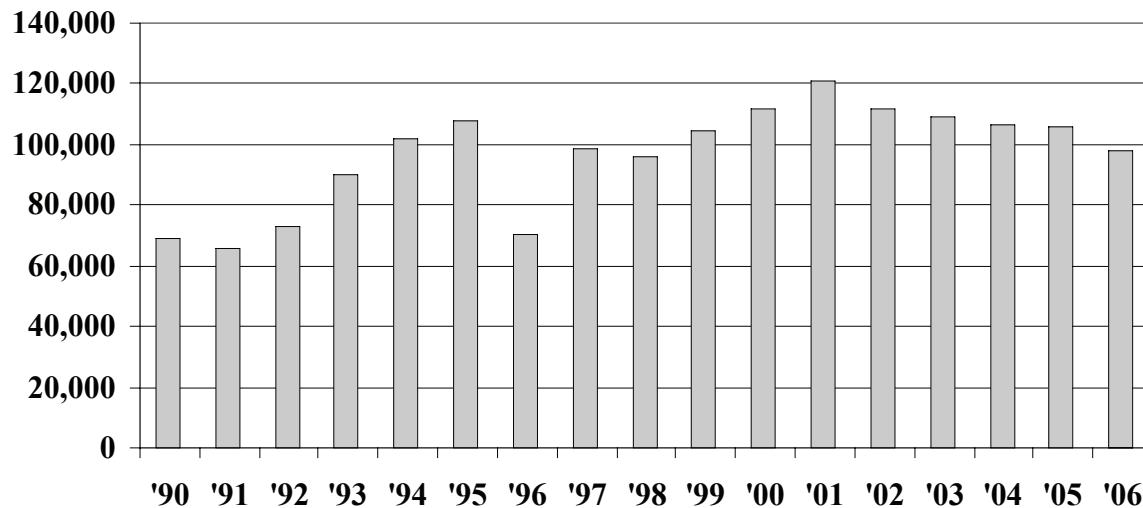


Figure IV-1. Annual Visitation, 1990-2006

Visitation has been counted using the same formula since at least 1988, as shown below:

South Side

March – November: 3 persons-per-car on weekdays; 4 persons-per-car on weekends and state holidays.

December – February: 2 persons-per-car on weekdays; 4 persons-per-car on weekends and state holidays.

North Side

March – November: 3 persons-per-car. December – February: 2 persons-per-car.

AREA POPULATION TRENDS

The population in the area served by Raven Rock State Park is identified as the following six counties for this analysis: Chatham, Cumberland, Harnett, Johnston, Lee, and Wake. The total population in this area - 927,207 in 1990 - grew almost 34 percent in ten years to 1,242,168. By 2005, another 171,640 people lived in the area, bringing the total to 1,413,808. Wake and Cumberland counties, with 746,336 and 313,000 residents respectively, account for most the area's population.

This population growth has resulted in more people seeking outdoor recreation opportunities, and Raven Rock State Park's visitation has increased as a result. During the next ten years, it is predicted the population of the six-county area will grow by 348,258 people (24.6 percent) to 1,762,066 in 2015. As the area's population continues to increase, additional pressures will be placed on the park's resources, facilities and staff.

MONTHLY VISITATION TRENDS

Raven Rock State Park has an unusually long visitor-use season that extends from March through November. Monthly visitation picks up considerably as the warmer weather of spring arrives, with April being the peak month with an average visitation of 12,834. Visitation remains high through November, although it does dip with August's hot weather. With the onset of colder weather, it drops approximately fifty percent for the winter months (Figure IV-2). Raven Rock's visitation consists primarily of day use since no large tent and trailer campground exists, and primarily hikers and picnickers use the park.

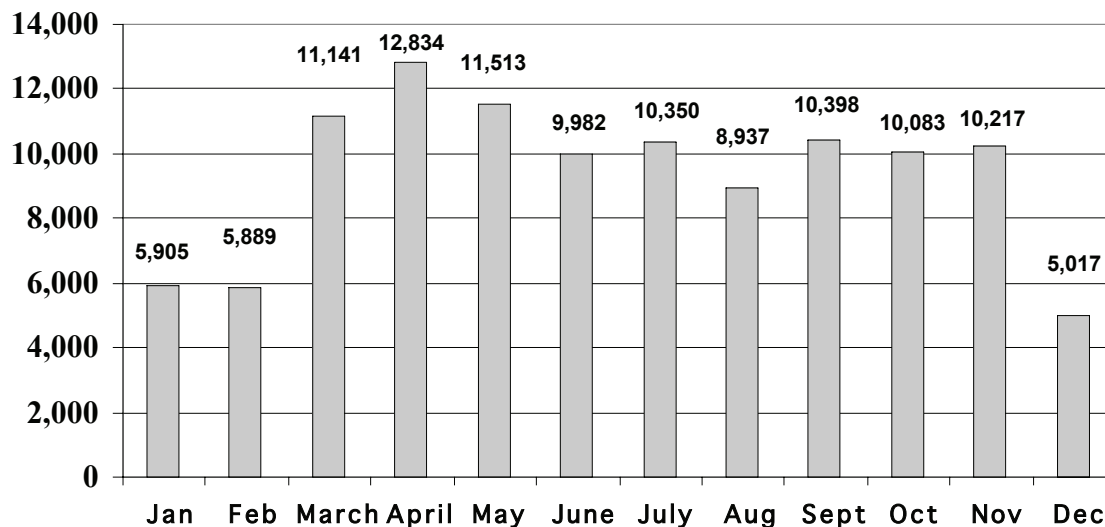


Figure IV-2. Average Monthly Visitation, 2001-2004

CAMPING USE

Raven Rock State Park has a total of 11 primitive campsites and five primitive group campsites. Camping use is light. During fiscal year 2005-2006, each of these campsites were used an average of 29 days annually.

VISITOR INFORMATION

In 1987 the United States Forest Service was contracted to conduct a Public Area Recreation Visitors Survey (PARVS) for the North Carolina State Parks System. The survey was designed to identify visitor socio-economic characteristics and economic contributions to the state's economy. Raven Rock State Park was not one of the eight park units involved in the survey, but the general information concerning state park visitors is useful in assessing visitation trends at the park.

Why do people visit state park units? The convenient location was cited by 31 percent of the respondents; 25 percent thought other areas were too crowded; 21 percent liked the quality facilities; 8 percent wanted to try a new area; 7 percent enjoyed the scenic beauty; and 6 percent came to see the attraction.

More than one third of state park visitors come from within a 30-mile radius (37 percent), while 17 percent come from 30 to 60 miles away. Survey respondents indicated that the parks were their sole destination 86 percent of the time. While many visitors come from nearby, the average one-way distance traveled was 139 miles. Approximately 25 percent of state park visitors come from out of state. Visitors averaged 4.1 trips per year to North Carolina state parks.

Seventy-eight percent of those surveyed indicated that they were return visitors. The average number of return trips per year was six. Sixty-one percent of visitors statewide came with family members, 16 percent with friends, and 7 percent with both family and friends. Ten percent of visitors came alone. Visitors also came in small numbers in organized groups and multiple families.

PARVS data indicates that 16.8 percent of groups surveyed used more than one car, and that the average number of persons per car was 3.0. The average age of the park visitor was 38.2 years. The age distribution was as follows:

Table IV-1. Percent of Visitors by Age Group

<u>Under 6</u>	6-12	13-18	19-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	Over 65
6.7	11.6	10.6	12.5	20.1	16.9	0.9	7.3	4.4

Since over 18 percent of visitors are under the age of 13, a demand exists for children's programs and facilities. Approximately 12 percent of visitors are 56 and older. This older segment of the general population will be increasing, and as it does, demand for improved quality, accessibility, and safety should increase.

OUTDOOR RECREATION PARTICIPATION IN NORTH CAROLINA

The five most popular outdoor recreation activities in North Carolina are walking for pleasure, driving for pleasure, viewing scenery, participating in beach activities, and visiting historical sites. Three out of every four households participated in walking for pleasure at least once in the past 12 months (Table IV-2). In addition to the five most popular activities, over fifty percent of the households responding to a 1989 survey participated at least once in the following activities: swimming (in lakes, rivers, or oceans), visiting natural areas, picnicking, attending sports events, visiting zoos, and freshwater fishing.

The North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Participation Survey was mailed to 3,100 randomly selected residents in the spring of 1989. Forty-five percent, or 1,399 people, returned completed surveys. Each person receiving the survey was asked to estimate the number of times that household members had participated in each of 43 activities. The survey results provide good insight into the current participation of North Carolinians in a wide range of outdoor recreation activities. While the North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Participation Survey is now 16 years old, its survey results closely mirror those of the National Survey on Recreation and the Environment conducted in 1994-1995 and 2000.

Table IV-2. Outdoor Recreation Activities Ranked by Popularity.

RANK	ACTIVITY	PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS PARTICIPATING
1.	Walking for Pleasure	75%
2.	Driving for Pleasure	72
3.	Viewing Scenery	71
4.	Beach Activities	69
5.	Visiting Historical Sites	62
6.	Swimming (in Lakes, Rivers, and Oceans)	54
7.	Visiting Natural Areas	53
8.	Picnicking	52
9.	Attending Sports Events	52
10.	Visiting Zoos	51
11.	Fishing - Freshwater	50
12.	Use of Open Areas	41
13.	Swimming (in Pools)	40
14.	Fishing - Saltwater	38
15.	Attending Outdoor Cultural Events	35
16.	Bicycling for Pleasure	32
17.	Other Winter Sports	31
18.	Camping, Tent or Vehicle	29
19.	Softball and Baseball	28
20.	Hunting	28
21.	Use of Play Equipment	28
22.	Power Boating	26
23.	Trail Hiking	26
24.	Jogging or Running	24
25.	Basketball	24
26.	Nature Study	22
27.	Golf	22
28.	Target Shooting	20
29.	Water Skiing	19
30.	Camping, Primitive	14
31.	Tennis	14
32.	Use Motorcycles, Dirt Bikes, ATVs	13
33.	Use Four Wheel Drive Vehicles	13
34.	Canoeing and Kayaking	13
35.	Horseback Riding	12
36.	Volleyball	12
37.	Downhill Skiing	12
38.	Football	11
39.	Soccer	7
40.	Sailboating	7
41.	Skateboarding	6
42.	Cross Country Skiing	2
43.	Windsurfing	1

PRIORITIES OF PUBLIC OUTDOOR RECREATION FUNDING

The North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Survey asked residents a series of questions in order to identify and rank future demand for various types of public outdoor recreation activities. Future demand was determined by asking them which activities they would have tried more often had adequate facilities been available. Respondents were then asked to rank these activities in order of importance. A scoring system was used assigning each activity a rating of high, moderate or low future demand based on the survey results.

In the second part of the analysis, the respondents' level of support for publicly funded outdoor recreation activities was determined by asking them to identify and rank those activities to which government should give highest priority when spending public money. The same scoring system used to analyze unmet demand was then applied to the survey results, with each activity receiving a high, moderate or low rating in public support for public funding.

In the final part of the needs analysis, the two ratings for each activity were combined to produce a score from one to nine that reflected both future demand and public funding priorities. The activities that ranked high in both future demand and support for public funding received the highest priority in the needs assessment. Support for public funding was given higher priority than expressed demand (Table IV-3).

Table IV-3. Priorities for Future Outdoor Recreation Activities

ACTIVITY	CODE	FUTURE DEMAND	SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC FUNDING
Walking for Pleasure	1	High	High
Camping, Tent or Vehicle	1	High	High
Picnicking	1	High	High
Beach Activities	1	High	High
Fishing - Freshwater	1	High	High
Attend Outdoor Cultural Events	1	High	High
Visiting Natural Areas	2	Moderate	High
Use of Play Equipment	2	Moderate	High
Visiting Zoos	2	Moderate	High
Visiting Historical Sites	2	Moderate	High
Bicycling for Pleasure	3	High	Moderate
Swimming (in Pools)	3	High	Moderate
Viewing Scenery	4	Moderate	Moderate
Hunting	4	Moderate	Moderate
Trail Hiking	4	Moderate	Moderate
Use of Open Areas	4	Moderate	Moderate
Target Shooting	4	Moderate	Moderate
Swimming (Lakes, Rivers, Ocean)	4	Moderate	Moderate
Fishing - Saltwater	4	Moderate	Moderate

Based on this analysis, the activities rated as having the highest priorities are activities that are

currently or could potentially be provided at Raven Rock State Park. The activities include walking for pleasure, tent or vehicle camping, picnicking, fishing, visiting natural areas, viewing scenery, trail hiking, and using open areas.

NEARBY OUTDOOR RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

Raven Rock State Park is an important recreation resource in the eastern Piedmont. No other similar state parks serve this region of the state. The closest state park unit is Jordan Lake State Recreation Area, located to the northwest in Chatham County. Jordan Lake offers extensive camping facilities and swimming, but the setting and visitor experience are not comparable to Raven Rock. The high number of sites, the close spacing between sites, the emphasis on trailer camping, and the sounds of motor boats create a visitor experience that is oriented toward the recreational use of the lake.

A local government park, San-Lee Park, is located north of Sanford in adjacent Lee County. It provides ten trailer campsites with hookups and 13 tent campsites and offers recreation and environmental education.

The Dunn-Erwin Rail Trail, maintained by the City of Dunn and Town of Erwin, is a 5.3 mile walking and biking trail that connects the two municipalities. It opened in June 2003. The All American Trail, a recreational pathway for hikers, runners and bicyclers, is a ten-to-15 foot unpaved pathway that is planned to follow the 70-mile perimeter boundary of Fort Bragg. As of December 2006, ten miles of the trail had been opened.

Weymouth Woods State Nature Preserve is located in southeastern Moore County. The sandhills park has five miles of hiking trails, picnicking, a visitor's center and exhibits, and offers interpretive programs.

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